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Grief and Duty.

A DISCOURSE.

BY HENRY DARLING, D. D.



GRIEF AND DUTY.

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D I S C O U R S E

DELIVERED IN THE

FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, ALBANY,

APRIL 19TH, 1865, THE DAY OF THE

FUNERAL OBSEQUIES

OF

PRESIDENT LINCOLN.

By HENRY DARLING, D. D.,
Pastor of ^{the} Church.

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The *time* of the delivery of this discourse is sufficient to indicate the haste of its preparation. It contains nothing more than the expression of some of the *first* thoughts that our great national bereavement suggests; and it is only in deference to repeated solicitations that the author consents to its publication.

The discourse was repeated at the United States Military Hospital of this city, on the afternoon of the Sabbath April 23d, 1865.

DISCOURSE.

Genesis xxxv, 19, 20, 21.

“And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave : that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar.”

The affliction recorded in these verses, has been the portion of not a few of our race, in every age of the world. Earthly affinities that we deem perpetual, are suddenly dissolved ; and worldly ties that we imagine are of cable strength, are in a moment, and forever sundered. Friends are but loaned to us by the Giver of every good gift, and often at the moment of our highest expectations are taken from us. *Few* families can be found that have no vacant chair at their table, and fewer hearts in which the death of some loved one has not left an aching void. The people of God are rapidly striking their tents in this wilderness, and entering into the palace not made with hands. They are going up from this gloomy crypt below, to the grand cathedral above ; and putting off this earthly house of their tabernacle, are being clothed upon with that house which is from heaven. The *home* of many a man in this world, like a dissolving view, is

gradually vanishing from earth, and is daily developing itself in the skies. Heaven is rapidly becoming colonized from earth, and a man need not himself to have been long in this vale of tears, to have seen so many that he loved successively emigrate to that other land, as to make it, even for the earthly friends that dwell there, the home where his heart is.

In a word, few are the travelers to eternity who do not pass on their way thither through the land of Bochim. How, in this passage, it becomes us to demean ourselves, is to all an important inquiry, and one to which we may, by an examination of my text, find a beautiful answer.

During a journey, undertaken by Jacob at the express command of Jehovah, from Succoth to Bethel, Rachel, the wife of his youth and of his love, *died*. In the strange city of Ephrath, the patriarch was constrained to consign to the grave, the precious remains of one who had endeared herself to him by years of faithful affection, and by a cheerful and happy participation of his sorrows, his companion, amid all his wanderings, and the light and charm of his dwelling. "And Rachel," says my text, "died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem."

But what, in the experience of this affliction, were the feelings, and what was the conduct of this eminently devoted servant of God? Was Jacob stoical and indifferent? Did he fail to mourn that a holy and beloved object of his affection had been removed by death? On the contrary, Jacob was deeply sen-

sible of the loss that he had sustained, and his heart was thereby filled with anguish. He did not in death, forget one who in life had so constantly ministered to his happiness. As a testimony at once for his grief at her sudden decease, and his high appreciation of her character, upon the cold earth beneath which she was sleeping he erected a monument to her memory. "He set," is the language of my text, "a pillar upon her grave," so permanent in its nature, and conspicuous in position, that it remained, and was called the pillar of Rachel, not only until the time of Moses, but even to the day when Saul was anointed King of Israel.

And similar feelings it is right that every individual should have in affliction. If some one dear and beloved, has been removed from earth, we ought to sorrow. Humanity demands it, and the Savior weeping over the tomb of Lazarus, allows it. Sorrow is an affection, implanted by the Creator in the soul for wise and beneficent purposes, and it should not be unduly repressed. God has opened in our nature a fountain of tears, and he who bids us restrain that fountain when God has touched its spring, demands us to act contrary to the very design of our constitution. If the gem that shone so beautifully by my fireside, and in the rays and sparkles of which I rejoiced so long, has been removed, it is natural for me to weep, and the man who bids me dry up my tears only mocks and degrades me.

As God also intends, when he bestows his gifts, that they should be received with smiles of gratitude, so he desires that when they are recalled, they should be surrendered with “drops of sacred grief.” Tears are the silent, pure, unsophisticated testimony of the heart, to the excellence of the gift God in mercy gave, and no doubt in mercy took away. We should have no gratitude in the reception of blessings, if we had no sorrow at their loss.

But though the Patriarch Jacob mourned at the death of Rachel, and as a testimony of his affection set, as we have seen, a pillar upon her grave, yet he did not—it is fact worthy of special notice—suffer his grief to prevent him from actively and faithfully discharging every duty. “And Israel journeyed,” says my text, “and spread his tent beyond the tower of Eder.”

Jacob was called in the providence of God, to act a very important part in the history of the Christian Church. At the very time this sad calamity overtook him, he was by the express command of Jehovah on his way to Bethel, the house of the Lord, and the place where God had previously revealed to him by vision the future triumphs of his kingdom. The Patriarch had a great work given him by God to perform. He had put his hand to the plough, and although doubtless when this affliction first broke upon him, his resolution trembled, and he was almost persuaded to turn back, and seek to allay the poignancy of his grief, by mingling in the famil-

iar society of his old home, yet at length triumphing over all these evil suggestions, with a wounded and a stricken heart, he pressed on in the path of duty. Having consigned to the earth the precious remains of his friend, and erected over them an appropriate monument of his grief, Jacob, in obedience to the command of Jehovah, continued his journey to Bethel — in other words, faithfully met every obligation that was imposed upon him as a servant of God.

The same should be true of us all in affliction. When grief impairs the health and preys upon the constitution; when it paralyzes the energies, and benumbs and stupefies the soul, so that incumbent duties, personal or relative, civil or sacred, are neglected, and the soul does nothing but lie down upon the sepulchre and weep, then is it a sorrow unworthy of the honorable name which the Christian bears.

Indeed, so to mourn over an affliction as to be thereby unfitted for the discharge of present and future duties, what a complete perversion is it of all the real designs of earthly trial! Affliction is the nursery in which God is training His people for a more vigorous manhood. It is the gymnasium in which He seeks to increase and strengthen their moral and spiritual power. What a perversion of His design, that, coming out from this nursery or gymnasium, weary and worn out with the discipline through which they have passed, they should lie down in listless inactivity!

The application of these principles, — pertinent to every instance of affliction that ever visits men in this world, — to that particular sorrow that has now convened us, and that lies to-day so heavily upon every heart, opens to us, if I mistake not, the only two channels in which our meditations can profitably flow.

First: We do well to mourn the loss of our late beloved President. His death is a great national bereavement. It is meet that we to-day set up upon his grave the monument of our warmest love, and that the whole nation should bedew it with their tears. But, secondly: called like Jacob to go up, as a people to our Bethel, on the highway to *peace* and *liberty*, this sore bereavement on the road, should not hinder or impede our footsteps, but like the old Patriarch, we, in the continued and faithful performance of every duty, should “journey on, and spread our tents beyond the tower of Edar.” To the amplification of these two thoughts, allow me, in what remains of this discourse, to invite attention.

The *character* of President LINCOLN is a true occasion for weeping over his death. Doubtless the time has not yet come for us to weigh this, in a perfectly even balance; and certainly our present position is for such a work exceedingly unfavorable. In the first gush of sorrow that our hearts feel for the loss of any earthly friend, we are but poorly prepared to form any critical estimate of his worth. Making, however, every possible allowance, for the peculiarly

tender feelings that we all feel for him, on account of his untimely death, he must be a bitter partizan indeed, that would not concede to our late President a very rare combination of both moral, and intellectual excellence. Called, in the providence of God, to the chief magistracy of this nation, at the most perilous moment that she has ever experienced in her whole history, and with no precedents to guide him, it must be conceded, that, as a whole, Mr. LINCOLN'S administration has been conducted with remarkable prudence, and consummate ability. Indeed, whatever difference of opinion may have, at the time, been honestly had, as to the wisdom of many of his important official acts, I suppose that they are few who, in the light of our recent victories, and the present position of freedom in our land, do not regard them with favor.

Some have denied to our late President the appellation of *great*, and, if a wide range of scholarship, or brilliant genius is essential to constitute true greatness, justly. But surely, he possessed just those peculiar traits of character, that were essential for the wise conduct of public affairs in a season of great peril. He was characterized by *great calmness of temper*. He was not a man of impulse. His heart was not so governed by strong passion, and tumultuous emotion, as to make his acts indiscreet and hasty. Whatever he did, was deliberate and well considered.

He was preëminently a practical man. He had no mere theories of government. With a remarkable quick perception of the true relation of things, his acts took their particular shape out of ever-varying circumstances. Either naturally conservative, or made so by the consciousness of high responsibility, he sought more to be directed by Providence than to direct and govern it. And yet Mr. LINCOLN was a man of great firmness of opinion. Naturally cautious, as I have just said, in assuming a position, he was at the same time exceedingly strenuous, after it was assumed, in maintaining it. His whole administration is marked by a steady progress toward one end. We see no flowing back in the onward wave. Ground once fairly taken was never given up. Some men at his very side chided him for *slowness*, but it did not quicken his step, and others equally near to him in influence, rebuked him for his *hastiness*, but it availed nothing to check his onward progress. Seizing, at the very moment of his inauguration, the first link of that chain — if I may so speak — which was to draw us out as a nation of that horrible vortex of secession into which almost half the states had fallen, Mr. LINCOLN never once relaxed his grasp upon it, but with a stalwort hand gathered slowly, but in a sure succession, each other link to himself, until at last our political salvation was secured.

And if to this you will now add the twin virtues of an intense patriotism, and a lofty and noble per-

sonal disinterestedness, the political portrait of our murdered President is almost complete.

In leaving his quiet home, to assume the high functions of state, you remember that our dear departed ruler, publicly requested an interest in the prayers of God's people. And never, at least since the days of Washington, has such a request found such a response. From the golden censer of our great high priest, has the sweet incense of prayer in his behalf, been constantly ascending. The intercession of the saints have belted with a zone of holy influence, every day and hour of his whole administration. And if the grave has seldom closed upon an American statesman, whose character was so resplendent with virtue, we doubt not, but that many an excellence heaven bestowed, in answer to her people's prayer.

But, *the time* of our beloved President's death, as well as his character, is a true occasion for sorrow. The soldier's work in our terrible internecine war seems almost ended. We have probably fought the last great battle of this rebellion, and hereafter the only flag that is to wave from the lakes to the gulf, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, is the red, white and blue. Indeed, already does it float in triumph, not only over the capital of the so-called confederacy, and of every seaport along the whole Atlantic coast line, but over the very fortress where it was first constrained to succumb to treason. But where the soldier's work closes, there the task of the

statesman commences. The first pulls down, it is the more difficult province of the last to build up: and Mr. LINCOLN was not a warrior but a civilian. And from his character as already described, as well as from his peculiarly intimate acquaintance with all our public affairs, how much did we naturally expect from him in this great work of reëstablishing between the discordant sections of our country, harmony and good will.

If our late President was great in time of war, I have a very mistaken idea of him, if he would not have been far greater in a time of transition from *peace* to *union*. He possessed the very character of a *pacifier*. His heart was full of gentleness and love. He was not able to cherish a bitter feeling, or a vindictive purpose. The last sentence in his last inaugural, reveals to us his very heart. "With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

That very conservatism which peculiarly characterized Mr. LINCOLN was, so far as we see, just *what* at this time we needed. In that struggle which has just commenced in this land between justice and mercy, that neither may gain a complete

victory, it was just such an evenly balancing intellect as his, a firm but loving hand, that we needed. Great peril will certainly here come to the state, if *radical views*, on either side of this great question are to prevail.

As free also from all theories, as regarding facts as they are, and adjusting his policy to them, how much in these days of reconstruction do we need just such a mind to direct us! To those who attentively read a speech made by our late President upon hearing the news of the surrender of Gen. Lee's army, upon that much vexed question of the political status of the states lately in rebellion, I need not allude to his truly Baconian and common sense method of disposing of the whole difficulty.

Moreover, how invaluable in the pacification of our great national troubles would have been the council and policy of our late President, as seen in the almost unbounded confidence that the people reposed in him! What Motley says of William the Silent, we may with hardly any less truthfulness say of ABRAHAM LINCOLN. "There was such general confidence in his sagacity, courage and purity, that the nation had come to think with his brain, and to act with his hand."* Surely at such a time, — amid the hosannas of victory and at the very moment when the warrior was retiring from the stage, that the statesman might take his place, — that he who was the foremost in all

* The United Netherlands, vol. 1, page 1.

that company should have fallen, is a large element in our sorrow.

And then, to add poignancy to our grief, there is the wretched *manner* of his death. So far, in our history as a nation, we have been happily exempt from those political assassinations that have so frequently darkened the records of the old world. And from our progress in a Christian civilization and refinement, we had really supposed ourselves to have outgrown such a possibility. We have not marveled much in seeing the princes of Europe, with their armed attendants, Napoleon with the bristling bayonets of his grenadiers, and the old Pope surrounded with the stalwort forms of his Swiss guards, for we were in a despotic country, and such men might well tremble for their lives; but surely, in this land of freedom and equal rights, no such security for human life can be needed, as no such peril can be felt.

But alas! for that depth of wickedness to which this ungodly rebellion has brought man. The murder of the head of a great nation, of a man of the kindest and most generous emotions, while sitting quietly in his chair, surrounded by his family and friends, is only the culmination of a rebellion that was commenced by purloining public property, arms, ships, forts, navy yards, and continued by the establishment at home of a military despotism that gave the citizen no choice between conscription and death; a rebellion that stripped the wounded on the battle field of every article of clothing, made personal ornaments out of

the bones of the dead, and starved, by thousands, those who had, by the fortunes of war, become its prisoners. True, our real loss would have been just the same had our dear President died a peaceful and natural death. But this terrible assassination! this passage, almost in a moment, by a ruffian's hand, into eternity, of one whose life and health God so kindly watched over and preserved, and who was seemingly of such moment to our country, O! it is this that makes our grief so *tumultuous*; and that, added to the other considerations already noted, converts every sanctuary in our land into a Bochim; brings this affliction home to every bosom with the force of a personal bereavement, and to-day causes this whole nation tearfully to follow to the grave its venerated head.

But I must pass from this view of our occasion for grief, to speak of the duties that, as citizens of this great country, are still before us to be faithfully met and performed. I have already said that this great national bereavement has met us, just as Jacob's deep personal affliction met him, on the highway of duty — while journeying to peace and liberty as he was to Bethel — and hence that, while with him we ought to mourn, with him we should likewise continue on in our way — “spread our tents beyond the tower of Edar.” Now what are some of these duties that the day imposes?

The first is *courage*. God's purposes never depend for their fulfillment upon any human instrumentality.

Men, to our purblind vision, seem oftentimes almost essential for the accomplishment, either in the church or state, of some great result ; they are in our esteem the pivot upon which everything turns ; but when, in his providence, God removes them, how easily by other instrumentalities does he carry on his work ! Protestantism did not die in Europe when William, the Prince of Orange, fell in his own palace by the murderous shot of a young Burgundian, nor when the renowned Gustavus Adolphus was, by an Austrian bullet, slain on the field of Lutzen. No, men die, but not so those great interests of truth that they may have lived to promote. Truth lives on, and when one of her greatest champions may have fallen, is sure to find another who will take up and plead her cause.

The very structure, likewise, of our government makes it almost impossible that the death of any one man should seriously change its policy, or endanger its stability. "If the Emperor Napoleon," says one of the journalists of the day, "had been assassinated, all France would have been in revolution before twenty-four hours had passed, while the death of President LINCOLN, sudden and awful as it was, did not interrupt, for an instant, the grand movements of our republican government. Take courage, then, I say, my dear hearers. Those great interests that you have prized so highly, and that seemed a few days ago so near, are not seriously jeopardized even by

this crushing bereavement. It cannot be made to galvanize any new life into the defunct carcass of rebeldom. It cannot raise for them a new army, or impart any fresh courage to the remnant that still remains. It cannot open to their commerce a single blockaded port. It cannot bring back into bondage and manacle anew, a single slave that has already breathed the fresh air of freedom. Nor can it annul or in the slightest degree change a single edict of the government. No, though the body of ABRAHAM LINCOLN may be mouldering in the dust, yet his soul will — in him who has already assumed the responsibilities of his office — be *marching on and on*, till the great purposes of his administration accomplished, peace and liberty will be enjoyed throughout the whole land. *Courage then I say, courage!*

But, with *courage*, the duties of this day demand that all the bitterness and rancor of party spirit should be forgotten, and that men of every possible shade of political belief should now *stand together* for the support of the nation.

Lord Macauley, in one of his lays of ancient Rome, thus speaks of that people in the palmy days of the Republic.

Then none was for a party ;
 Then all were for the state ;
 Then the great man helped the poor,
 And the poor man loved the great.
 Then lands were fairly portioned ;
 Then spoils were fairly sold,
 The Romans were like brothers
 In the brave days of old.

O ! that the affliction that God has sent upon this people might here recall them to duty ! Children are very prone, you know, to remember their unkindness to each other, and to feel strongly attracted toward each other when summoned from their far off wanderings to the old homestead ; together to bury their common parent. It is an adage that affliction makes brothers of us all. Would that this might be the result of our great national bereavement.

Scarcely anything, I think, for the last half century, has had toward this nation so threatening an aspect as the extreme selfishness and passion of party. Our public men, oftentimes, do not look at the real desirableness of a proposed measure, but entirely at its influence in securing the political ascendancy of their party. They seek their own, not their country's good. They belong, not to our whole nation, but to some little clique, some poor section or fraction only of our great brotherhood. Would, I repeat it, that the affliction under which we now mourn might lead us all nearer to the altar of our country, and beget within us all a more noble and unselfish patriotism.

And I cannot here refrain from expressing the pleasure which I have felt in observing, since the death of Mr. LINCOLN, the tone on this subject of the press, without any distinction of party. It has greatly rejoiced my heart to see on every side the exhortation, "Let us rally as one man to the support of our government in this crisis." Let no man in

an hour like this *think*, much less *talk*, of party or partisanship. Let there be no crimination or recrimination. Let us all sacrifice our preferences and our prejudices upon the altar of our country, and rally around the man who rises in the room of a stricken down predecessor, and make him feel that he has the physical and moral support of the whole people." Should such a spirit prove itself to be more than words, should it manifest itself in appropriate acts, and be more than ephemeral, well might this whole nation exclaim: "It was good for us that we were afflicted."

But this is not all. The act that calls us this day to mourn, — the culmination, as I have already said of that evil spirit which first broke out in treason four years ago, and opened hostile cannon upon Sumter, — is it not our duty to be led thereby to a deeper and truer conviction, of the moral turpitude of a social system that could beget and foster such a spirit? "By their fruits," said our Savior, "ye shall know them."

Among all the men educated under the influence, and in the midst of northern society, I do not believe that you could find an individual who would deliberately, and day by day plan, and finally execute, so fiendish an act as that of Mr. LINCOLN'S assassination. Depravity does indeed ripen, even with us, fearfully, but to attain so gigantic a growth as this, it must have its roots in a more congenial soil. The most terrible, and as it seems to me, wicked event of centuries,

nothing but long familiarity and close contact with that whole system of oppression, as it has existed at the south for years, and with the spirit that it engenders, could ever have made it possible.

I say this with no desire to intensify that passion which has already gone down deep into the heart of this nation, and which, in the revengeful spirit that it may awaken, is in danger, perhaps, of exciting an undue hate in loyal bosoms ; I allude to it only that our eyes may be opened to see the enormity of a system that could produce such a character as its legitimate fruitage — a system that has brought upon us all those calamities that have afflicted us for years, and to destroy which has doubtless been the purpose of God, in constraining us to draw the sword.

“ We prayed and hoped, but still with awe
The coming of the sword we saw ;
We heard the nearing steps of doom
And saw the shade of things to come.

We hoped for peace, our eyes surveyed
The blood-red dawn of freedom's day ;
We prayed for love to loose the chain,
’Tis shorn by battle’s axe in twain.

A redder sea than Egypt’s wave
Is piled and parted for the slave ;
A darker cloud moves on in light,
A fiercer fire is guide by night.”

I close with the simple remark of the vanity of human greatness—a remark which, although it may have no direct logical connection with what I have said, — is too obviously suggested by the whole theme upon which I speak to-day, to be omitted.

After Saladin, the champion of Islamism, had retaken the holy city, subjugated numerous fortresses in Syria, Arabia, Persia and Mesopotamia, and performed so many exploits in the crusades as to be designated "the great," he was seized with a disorder which threatened to wither up in a moment all his garlands of victory. Seeing that death was inevitable, he called his herald who used to carry his banner before him, and taking the lance which he had so often shaken in battle, tied his shroud to the top and said to him, Go unfurl this in the camp—it is the flag of the day—wave it in the air and exclaim, "This is all that remains of Saladin, the great, the conqueror, the king of the empire." It is the office of this same herald that I perform to-day. I take the shroud of our murdered President, and fastening it, as it were, to the end of my trumpet, wave it before your eyes, exclaiming, this is all that remains of his hopes, plans, power, influence.

One week ago Mr. LINCOLN was the most powerful man in this nation. Half a million of armed men were ready at an instant to do his bidding. His name was a tower of strength. Men everywhere delighted to do him honor, and the long desired object of his heart—that for which he had so intently labored and prayed—an unbroken union of all the states, seemed just within his grasp. With a happy heart and a buoyant step he left his home. Loud acclamations welcomed him as

he entered a public assembly. Crowds turned their eager gaze upon one so highly and so deservedly honored. To-day he is a lifeless corpse, and while we speak, is being carried out, like any other man, to his burial.

So ephemeral a thing is human greatness. And will men then fasten upon this as the supreme end of their being? Is it wise for any one to seek alone that from which at death he must be eternally parted? O, no; man has higher interests than those which belong to this world.

“The wise man walks with God,
Surveys far on the endless line of life,
Values his soul, thinks of eternity,
Both worlds considers, and provides for both.”

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